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ABSTRACT

To investigate reactions to violence between intimate partners, 125 undergraduates (68 males, 57 females) completed a three-part questionnaire. The instrument assessed general attitudes about violence between intimates, respondents' personal history as victim or abuser, and their willingness to use the label "battering". In addition, 24 evaluation, perception, and attribution questions for a hypothetical scenario involving intimate-partner violence were included. Results showed that respondents who had been both victim and abuser (8%) had longer violent relationships, were more likely to still be in those relationships, and reported more occurrences of violent episodes than persons who had been only victims (10%) or abusers (6%). Abusers were found to be as empathetic toward a hypothetical victim as were those who had been victims; however, those in the roles of victim and abuser emerged as significantly lower in victim empathy. Respondents who had had violent experiences (either as victim, abuser, or both) declined to use the term "battering" in reference to themselves. However, those who had suffered the most serious consequences in a violent relationship were the most willing to label an experience battering. Whether the victim responded passively or was violent in return affected respondents' evaluations of the scenario, with the specific form of the effect in each case dependent upon the nature of the respondents' own experiences with intimate violence. Two tables and 13 figures are appended. (LLL)

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Understanding Violence Between Intimate Partners: The Effects of Personal Experience and Victim Reactions on Labelling it "Battering" and Allocating Blame

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Understanding Violence Between Intimate Partners:
The Effects of Personal Experience and Victim Reactions on
Labelling it "Battering" and Allocating Blame

Despite the rapidly growing literature concerned with violence between intimate partners, many questions about how couples construe these events remain unanswered. The study I will report here had three main goals: The first purpose was to identify how one's own personal experiences with intimate violence may relate to general attitudes and/or affect one's evaluations of specific episodes. While these connections seem plausible enough, there has been little empirical grounding for them to date. The second aim was to uncover the dynamics of "labelling" in this context, i.e., when will a person regard a given episode as "battering"? Little is presently known on this point, yet such labelling may be a critical prerequisite to helpseeking. Finally, the third goal of the research was to determine how a victim's reactions (violent or nonviolent) to an assault by an intimate partner might modify observers' evaluations and perceptions of the episode. Since violent couple relationships typically involve violence by both parties (cf. Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), this point would appear to be critical to an understanding of how blame is allocated in most circumstances of intimate violence.

Method

Subjects

Undergraduate volunteers from introductory psychology classes at Iowa State University participated for experimental credit. On signing up for the study, subjects were told that they would be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire on their (1) attitudes, (2) personal experiences, and (3) judgments of case studies regarding both physical aggression between intimates and episodes of forced sex.

The final sample of 125 who completed questionnaires was composed of 68 males (54%) and 57 females (46%). Participants were mostly Caucasian (86%), with only small percentages of Black (4%), Oriental (4%), Hispanic (3%), and Amerind students (1%), (the remaining subjects did not indicate any classification).

The 19-20 year-old age range predominated the sample (50%), with substantial proportions falling in the 21-22 year (34%) and 17-18 year (14%) ranges, as well. Although the average ages for male and female respondents did not differ, the genders were distributed differently, since females tended to be over-represented in the youngest and oldest groupings, while males predominated in the mid-ranges.

Instrument

Respondents completed a three-part questionnaire, which addressed the topic of forced sex as well as battering, but this report will focus only on those questions concerned with violence between intimate partners (a total of 93 multiple-choice and 8 short-answer questions). Part I included

17 questions (detailed in Sedlak, Note 1), which assessed general attitudes about violence between intimates. This "Battering Empathy" Scale (BES) was developed specifically for the present study and was modeled after the Rape Empathy Scale (RES), developed by Deitz et al. (1982). Part II contained two subsections assessing the respondent's personal history as victim and/or abuser in violent episodes with an intimate partner. Persons who reported such experiences indicated the nature and the length of the relationship, the types of abuse and injury that occurred, and rated the extent to which they regarded the behavior as "battering." Part III of the questionnaire included a "case study" involving intimate-partner violence. This was a brief hypothetical scenario which systematically varied three dimensions in a 2x2x2 design: the introductory Instructions (Standard vs. Empathy Instructions), the Force used by the abusive partner (High vs. Low), and the victim's physical response to the assault (High vs. Low Resistance). The specific scenario used is given in Table 1, together with the alternative texts selected to manipulate the three factors. Each participant received only one scenario, with approximately equal numbers of the different questionnaire versions distributed among participants of a given gender. Following the scenario in Part III were 24 evaluation, perception, and attribution questions, discussed in detail in the description of results.

Results and Discussion

General Limitations of the Study

Two major limitations of the project should be borne in mind throughout this discussion. First, the fact that the sample was self-selected means that frequencies and correlations may not be generalizable beyond this group. Moreover, it means that this group (and its subgroups) may have been especially sensitive (or insensitive) to the dimensions varied in the scenario. Second, because the findings reported here are based on questions embedded in a longer questionnaire which also asked about forced sex, and because embedding the violence questions in this context may have influenced responses in indeterminate ways, this project is best regarded as a pilot study and should be confirmed by replication in future research which focusses solely on intimate violence.

Experiences With Intimate Violence

Nearly one-fourth (24%) of the sample reported personal experiences with violence in an intimate relationship: 10% solely as victims, 6% solely as abusers, and 8% as both victims and abusers. Female participants were more frequently victims (16% of females, 6% of males), whereas greater proportions of males were abusers (7% males vs. 4% females) or both victim and abuser (13% males vs. 2% females).

Reflecting the young, independent, and predominantly unmarried status of the respondents, the great majority of those who experienced intimate violence did so in dating relationships (80%), as opposed to relationships with cohabiting partners (7%), spouses (3%), ex-spouses (3%), or parents (7%).

Although many of those who had experiences with Both victim and abuser roles had evidently been involved in reciprocal physical abuse with a single partner, some reported their victim experiences in connection with one relationship and their abuser experiences in another. For this reason, it was

necessary to distinguish between the reports given by Both-role respondents regarding their victim experiences (Both/V), and those associated with their abuser experiences (Both/A).

Overall, one-third (33%) who had experiences with violence were still in the abusive relationship, although this proportion varied markedly depending on the respondent's role in the violence: only 8% of Victim, and 29% of Abuser, but 70% of Both/V and 56% of Both/A relationships were ongoing at the time of the study. Not only were Victims and Abusers less likely to still be in their violent relationships, but their relationships were also shorter in duration and the violence occurred less frequently than for respondents with Both role experiences. The majority of Victims (69%) and Abusers (100%) had violent relationships of less than a year in duration, whereas greater proportions of those with Both experiences continued their relationships longer (60% of Both/V relationships and 67% of Both/A relationships were a year or longer in duration). Moreover, Victims and Abusers typically experienced the violence only once (54% and 71%, respectively), whereas a greater proportion of those with a history of Both roles experienced violence more frequently ("every few months" typified 56% of the Both/A reports, and 50% of Both/V reports indicated that violent episodes occurred at least monthly).

The most serious injury a respondent reported suffering (as victim) or inflicting (as abuser) was classified into one of four categories: none, objects only (torn clothing, broken glasses), minor personal injuries (scrapes, splinters, small bruises), and moderate personal injuries (medium bruises, cuts, twisted wrists). Although large proportions of all groups denied there was any injury as a result of the violence, some intergroup differences were apparent. Abusers most strongly denied inflicing any injury, whereas the only reports of moderate levels of personal injury occurred in accounts of a respondent's own victimization (i.e., Victim and Both/V reports).

In summary, the sample of participants included a substantial minority with personal experiences in violent dating relationships, and subgroupings of the respondents based on their roles in the violence revealed both qualitative and quantitative differences among them in other respects. Specifically, respondents who had been both victim and abuser tended to have longer violent relationships, were more likely to still be in their violent relationships, and reported more frequent occurrences of violent episodes compared with persons who had been only victims or only abusers. Reports of the maximum injury inflicted or received differed along the abuser/victim dimension, with only victims reporting moderately serious consequences and abusers more frequently denying any injurious results of their actions.

Attitudes About Intimate Violence

The results regarding the 17-item Battering Empathy Scale (BES) were detailed elsewhere (Sedlak, Note 1), and only those aspects relevant to the present concerns will be reiterated here. Scores on this scale potentially ranged from 70 to 150 points, and coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was found to be .796 for the item set, demonstrating an acceptable level of internal consistency.

The four subject groupings with different experiences with violence differed significantly in overall Battering Empathy scores ($F(3,121)=4.998$,

$p < .01$). Scheffé tests of pairwise differences revealed that respondents who had experienced Both roles were significantly less empathetic than each of the other three groups on total BES scores, but that there were no significant differences in empathy among Victims, Abusers, or those with no experiences with intimate violence.

Comparisons of the groups on individual scale items revealed that this difference in overall BES derived primarily from answers to a single item ($F(3,121)=6.815$, $p < .001$). This question asked respondents to indicate whether they "would find it easier to imagine the feelings of the [Victim or the Abuser] during a battering episode" by choosing a scale value along a nine-point continuum ranging from "Victim" at one extreme (1), through "Both Equally" at the mid-point (5), to "Abuser" at the other pole (9). Scheffé tests of pairwise differences again indicated that the ratings of those who had experienced Both roles differed from those of the other respondents but that the remaining three groups did not differ among themselves. Specifically, those with Both experiences felt they could equally imagine the feelings of Victim and Abuser ($X_B=5.1$), whereas all the other respondent groups more easily imagined the Victim's feelings ($X_N=2.94$, $X_V=1.62$, $X_A=1.86$).

Thus, the group differences in attitudes were a mix of expected and surprising findings. On the one hand, one might have expected that persons with experiences as Victims in situations of intimate violence would evidence greater empathy on the BES than those with no experiences of this sort or than those whose experiences had been as Abusers. Clearly the present findings did not bear this out. Indeed, those who had been Abusers were as empathetic toward a hypothetical victim as were those who had themselves been victims of an intimate partner. On the other hand, respondents who had reported backgrounds in Both roles emerged as significantly lower in victim-empathy than the remainder of the sample. Note that this group was also distinguished by a deeper involvement in intimate violence in that their violent relationships tended to be ongoing, of longer duration, and were associated with more frequent experiences of violence. Interestingly, this pattern is the reverse of that which prevails in the arena of rape, where persons who have been victimized or have resisted an assailant are more empathetic with victims than those with less involvement (cf. Deitz et al., 1982). At the same time, it is not an altogether surprising result when its specific source in the present context is understood: i.e., those with experience in Both roles found it equally easy to imagine the feelings of hypothetical victims and abusers alike.

Calling One's Own Experiences "Battering"

Respondents who reported experiences of violence in their intimate relationships were asked to rate the extent to which they considered these events "battering" on a 9-point scale. Most declined to apply the "battering" label to their own experiences: only 21% of those who responded rated their experiences above the mid-point toward the "battering" pole, whereas 68% gave ratings below the mid-point, thereby not regarding their experiences as battering, and 11% were noncommittal (at the mid-point).

The three groups with violent experiences did not differ in their ratings, and exploratory analyses have thus far uncovered only one significant correlate of their self-labelling decisions: these decisions were related to the degree

of maximum injury suffered by those in victim roles (i.e., Victims and Both/V respondents: r_V=+.620, $p < .025$; $r_{B/V}$=+.679, $p < .025$), but labelling decisions were not related to the severity of injuries reportedly inflicted by respondents in the abuser roles (Abusers and Both/A accounts).

Table 2 presents the results of a content analysis of short-answer explanations for the decision about calling one's own experience "battering." (Since a respondent's explanation was included in any and all applicable explanation categories, the table total exceeds 100%). The results confirm the importance of physical injury as a criterion for applying the "battering" label. Also important among the labelling criteria mentioned were characteristics of the physical abuse itself (particularly its duration and repetitiveness), the underlying motives for the abuse (whether the intention was to physically harm the partner, whether the abuser's anger was understandable), and the emotional context of the relationship in general.

In summary, respondents declined to use the term "battering" in referring to themselves, and their willingness to use it depended on the seriousness of the injuries suffered by those who were victims of their partners' abuse.

Reactions to the Case Study

Method of Analysis. Recall that the hypothetical scenario in Part III of the questionnaire occurred in eight different versions according to a 3-way Instructions (2) X Force (2) X Resistance (2) design. In addition to expected that these stimulus dimensions might affect evaluations and perceptions, one might reasonably also expect that respondents' background experiences with violence would condition their responses to the case study. Because a Sex X Experience classification of respondents could not be analyzed (as it resulted in a cell with only one respondent), separate series of analyses were necessary to assess the influences of these characteristics. The first series, reported in Sedlak (Note 1), analyzed the reaction data according to a 5-way design: Battering Empathy (2) X Sex (2) X Instructions (2) X Force (2) X Resistance (2). The second series of analyses, reported here, focussed on the effects of personal experiences with violence in relation to the different story dimensions. Again, it was necessary to adapt to the limits of the respondent sample, which led to empty (and nearly empty) cells in the 4-way classification of Experience (4) X Instructions (2) X Force (2) X Resistance (2). As a result, three separate 2-way ANOVAs were necessary: Experience (4) X Instructions (2), Experience (4) X Force (2), and Experience (4) X Resistance (2).[1]

Because of greatly differing n's within the cells of these 2-way classifications, it was necessary to use a method of analysis appropriate for this situation. Further, because sophisticated statistical packages were not available for the preparation of this report, the method used was computationally straightforward, treating cell means as single observations and adjusting the error mean square by a correction factor (cf. Edwards, 1968). Nevertheless, caution is urged in considering the results, since the method yields only approximate results.

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[1]The 3-way Instructions (2) X Force (2) X Resistance (2) interaction, together with its component 2-ways, were treated in the larger 5-way ANOVAs reported reported in Sedlak (Note 1).

Since the likelihood of a Type I error was inflated by the number of tests performed here, the alpha level was adjusted by requiring that an effect attain what would ordinarily be the .001 level in order to be regarded as significant in the present context.[2]

Calling the Case Study "Battering." Respondents rated the extent to which they considered the incident described in the case study to be "battering" on a 1 ("not at all") to 9 ("completely") scale. Only the two-way Experience X Resistance effect attained the .001 level on this question ($F(3,117)=17.36$). As Figure 2 shows, the victim's Resistance made no difference to the labelling decisions of respondents with no experiences of intimate violence and had little impact on those who had been solely Abusers. On the other hand, those who had been Victims themselves and those with experiences in Both roles were influenced in opposite ways: Victims were less likely to call it battering when the hypothetical victim physically resisted her abuser, whereas those with Both types of experience were less likely to consider it "battering" when she did not physically respond to her partner's assault. It is interesting that these are the respondent groups with personal experiences as victims and that their labelling decisions regarding the case study tended to reject the "battering" term for response patterns that departed from their own typical reactions to their partners (Victims having not reported themselves as violent in response, but Both-role respondents often describing reciprocal violence in their backgrounds).

Punishing the Abuser. The extent to which the abuser should be punished was indicated on a 1("not at all") to 9 ("a great deal") scale. Responses to this question revealed only a main effect of Force: more punishment was recommended when the abuser used high Force ($\bar{X}=8.4$) than when he used low Force ($\bar{X}=6.4$), $F(1,116)=14.93$. As will be seen, this is one of the few main effects to emerge in this study, and the only main effect that remains unqualified by interactions. This underscores the importance of the degree of violence (and severity of consequences, with which it was associated in this study) in evaluations of episodes of intimate-partner violence.

Identification with the Victim and Abuser. Again, using 1 ("not at all") to 9 ("completely") rating scales, respondents showed the extent to which they felt similar to the hypothetical victim and abuser in the case study. One would naturally expect that some differences among the four experience groups would emerge on these measures, and they in fact did so--although perhaps not necessarily according to the most obvious patterns.

A main effect of Experience on ratings of similarity to the victim ($F(3, 117)=7.76$) reflected average ratings near the scale's midpoint by the Victims ($\bar{X}_V=4.9$) and Abusers ($\bar{X}_A=5.0$), moderately low ratings by those with no experiences of violence ($\bar{X}_N=3.6$), and the lowest average ratings by those with experiences in Both roles ($\bar{X}_B=2.2$). While it may come as some surprise to find such low victim-identification by Both respondents, who reportedly have been

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[2] Only one of the effects from the first completed series of analyses (largely given in Sedlak, Note 1) met this stringent test, and this result appears among the findings presented here as well (cf. the main effect of Force on recommended punishment for the abuser). Thus, neither sex nor battering empathy as measured by the BES (alone or in conjunction with the story dimensions), and none of the interactive effects of the story dimensions, were notable according to the present criterion.

victims themselves, this is nevertheless consistent with the fact that this group was distinguished by its low victim-empathy on the general attitude scales in Part I of the questionnaire (discussed above).

Another unexpected aspect of this finding is the relatively high level of victim-identification expressed by those who had been Abusers. However, the main effect of Experience on this question was qualified by an interaction with Resistance ($F(3,117)=14.76$), which may provide a reasonable account for this result. According to this interaction, graphed in Figure 3, Abusers departed markedly from the pattern exhibited by the other experience groups: whereas other respondents felt more similar to the victim when she did not offer high physical resistance, Abusers felt far more similar to her when she did. Thus, Abusers' victim-identification occurred primarily when the victim's behavior most closely matched their own personal actions, i.e., when she herself used physical force (albeit in response to her partner's abuse).

The different experience groups also differed in their feelings of similarity to the abuser ($F(3, 117)=9.36$), with the highest ratings offered by those who had personally experienced Both roles ($X_B=3.8$), and by Victims ($X_V=3.1$). Abusers felt relatively less identification with the hypothetical abuser in the case study ($X_A=2.4$), and respondents with no personal experiences of intimate violence felt least similar to him ($X_N=1.8$). Again, respondents with Both experiences were distinguished by their relatively higher abuser-identification, consistent with the results on the general attitude scales and with their relatively lower victim-identification, as well.

The comparatively higher abuser-identification of the Victim group, however, warrants discussion. Note that they confessed feelings of greater similarity to the abuser than did those who were Abusers themselves. Here, too, the significant interaction of Experience X Resistance ($F(3, 117)=5.87$) qualified the Experience main effect and provided a plausible account of the Victim group's overall level of abuser-identification. Figure 4, which graphs this interaction, reveals that the Victim group identified most with the abuser in the case study when the victim had offered high resistance, i.e., when this hypothetical abuser was himself "victimized."

Thus, both personal experiences and degree of victim resistance were important factors in determining feelings of similarity to victim and abuser protagonists in the case study. Those respondents with no personal experiences with intimate violence and those whose experiences had been in Both roles were relatively unaffected by the victim's reactions. Those with both experiences showed overall less identification with the victim and more with the abuser than the Victim and Abuser groups. Those who had no experiences with violence were at the opposite extremes. However, Victims and Abusers were differentially affected by the victim's resistance in responding to a non-familiar role. That is, Abusers showed greater levels of victim-identification when the victim resisted and (as they had done) used physical violence with her partner, whereas Victims showed greater levels of identification with the case study abuser when his victim resisted and used physical violence toward him (thereby victimizing him, as they had been).

Blame and Responsibility. The nine-point rating scale served as the basis for responses to four questions about blame and responsibility--two concerning how responsible the victim and the abuser had been for the incident,

and two regarding the extent to which each should be blamed for this incident. In all four cases, similar two-way interaction effects of Experience X Resistance characterized the data.

The pattern of results for judgments of the victim's responsibility is given in Figure 5 ($F(3, 117)=11.91$). As can be seen, the level of the victim's Resistance made virtually no difference to the decisions of those with no experiences of intimate violence, but the different violence-experienced groups varied in their judgments. Those who had been Victims assigned <u>far more</u> responsibility to the case study victim when she responded to her abuser violently than when she was passive in response, whereas those who had been Abusers and those who had been Both victims and abusers saw slightly <u>less</u> victim responsibility for the incident when she responded with high Resistance. The victim-blame decisions followed a very similar pattern ($F(3, 117)=19.62$).

It is interesting that these victim-responsibility and victim-blame decisions related systematically to the respondents' own behavior patterns. Respondents absolved the case study victim of responsibility and blame when her behavior with her partner matched their own behavior in intimate interactions, and they conferred relatively higher levels of blame and responsibility on her when her actions departed from a response pattern that was familiar to them.

Abuser-responsibility judgments ($F(3, 117)=15.80$) and abuser-blame decisions ($F(3, 117)=19.83$) were essentially mirror-images of this pattern: that is, there again was no effect of the different Resistance levels on those with no violent experiences, but Abusers and those with Both role experiences gave the case study abuser <u>greater</u> responsibility and blame when his victim resisted him, and Victims <u>absolved</u> him of responsibility and blame when she resisted.

It would appear that Victims consider violent resistance on the part of a victim to be a circumstance that <u>mitigates</u> the abuser's accountability in the situation (as it accentuates her own). Those who have themselves been physically violent toward an intimate partner regard the victim's violent response quite differently. Perhaps they consider her reactions as <u>consequences</u> which must be weighed in determining blame and responsibility and thus the stronger her reactions the more severe these judgments must be. In any event, while these interpretations are consistent with the results, they are admittedly speculative at this point.

<u>Abuser's and Victim's Control.</u> Ratings of how much control each protagonist had in the situation again yielded significant Experience X Resistance interactions and mirror-image patterns for the means in each case. Average ratings of the victim's control in the different Resistance conditions for the four experience groups are shown in Figure 6 ($F(3, 117)=25.25$). The inverse pattern described the means for ratings of the abuser's control in the situation ($F(3, 117)=29.05$). Resistance made essentially no difference in the ratings of those with no violent experiences or of those who had been Abusers, but differently affected the judgments of Victims and those who had experiences in Both roles. Victims saw the case study victim as having far more control in the situation when she resisted her assailant violently than when she responded passively. Certainly, this active response style contradicts their own typical reaction to their abusive partners. Perhaps they expected that such an actively-responding victim would thereby

gain more control over the situation, unlike their own typical feelings and experiences with their abusive partners. Alternatively, they may have believed that such a victim would necessarily have had more control over the situation to begin with in order to have had the option to respond in such an active way --a way so alien to their own experiences. In contrast, those who had experienced Both roles ascribed greater control to the passive victim. The reasons for this are not intuitively obvious. One possibility is that they, like the victims, believed that a person who responded dissimilarly to themselves would gain the control that had eluded them in their personal encounters. Another, less probable, explanation is that they (unlike all other respondents here) interpreted the question as referring to "self-control" and thus rated the victim as possessing more when she was passive than when she reacted violently. In any event, these interpretations remain conjectures at present and their validity must be assessed in future research.

Victim's Causal Involvement. Two questions required respondents to rate the degree to which the victim's personality characteristics and behaviors caused the incident in the case study. In both cases Experience X Resistance interactions described the data, although they differed in form in the two cases.

The results for the causal ratings regarding the victim's personality ($F(3, 117)=14.52$) resembled the victim-responsibility ratings in Figure 5 so closely that a separate graph was deemed redundant. That is, while the victim's resistance made no difference to respondents who were inexperienced in the subject, those who had been Victims were affected quite differently than the other two experienced groups. Victims saw the victim's personality as a strong causal force in the situation where she resisted violently. In contrast, those who had themselves been in the abuser role (Abuser and Both groups) saw the personality of the passive victim as contributing more to cause the violent situation than did the personality of the victim who responded actively.

The means associated with ratings of the causal contribution of the victim's behaviors are graphed in Figure 7 ($F(3, 117)=11.57$). Here, as with the victim's personality ratings, the level of resistance she offered made little difference to any but the Victim respondents, who felt her behaviors were a strong causal factor when she responded violently. The differences between ratings on this question and those of her personality are subtle. Here, those who had experiences in Both roles were in agreement with the direction espoused by the Victim's group and saw the violent victim's behaviors slightly more as a cause of the situation than they viewed the behaviors of the passive victim.

It might be argued that a third item concerning the victim was also relevant to judgments about her causal involvement--namely, a question that asked respondents to indicate how careless she was. Here, too, the two-way Experience X Resistance interaction emerged ($F(3, 117)=30.07$), and the pattern of means was again so remarkably similar to that given in Figure 5 that a separate graph was not provided here.

Overall, then, the results concerning judgments of the victim's causal contributions to the violent episode reiterated decisions about her responsibility for the incident. Victims regarded her as dramatically more responsible for the event, viewed her personality and behaviors as more causally implicated,

and considered her to be more careless when she offered strong resistance to her abusive partner. The ratings of the other experience groups were less strongly influenced by the victim's level of Resistance, and they differed in kind: Abusers' judgments reflected the opposite direction on each of these points; the views of those with Both abuser and victim experiences resembled those of the Abusers on all these points except the causal role of her behaviors (on which point those with Both experiences tended to agree more with Victims and ascribe a greater causal role when she resisted more strongly); respondents who had no personal experiences with violence in intimate relationships were essentially unaffected by the victim's level of resistance in formulating their judgments on these points.

It was noteworthy that neither of the remaining questions concerning causality yielded significant findings in this study--one concerning the abuser's personality characteristics and another concerning the role of chance factors in precipitating the episode.

Victim's Characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate how intelligent and how respectable the victim was, and in both cases a significant Experience X Resistance effect emerged.

Figure 8 graphs this interaction for ratings of the victim's intelligence ($F(3, 117)=8.04$). Note that this figure approximates a mirror-image of the means graphed in Figure 5, concerning her responsibility for the incident. Apparently, the more responsibility she was considered to have, the less intelligent she was deemed to be. Her level of Resistance was of only slight concern to respondents with no violent background, and to those who had been Abusers, or who had experiences as Both abuser and victim. In all three groups, the case study victim was viewed as slightly more intelligent when she strongly resisted than when she reacted passively. The Victim group, however, was again strikingly affected by her Resistance level. They perceived her to be a markedly less intelligent person when she reacted violently to her abuser's assault. Recall that, besides being related to victim's responsibility, this same overall pattern of group differences also characterized ratings of the degree to which the victim's personality causally contributed to the incident and of the degree to which the victim was careless. Here, again, the Victim respondent group judged their hypothetical counterpart especially severely when her behavior departed from their own reportedly passive responses to their abusive partners.

The degree to which the participant groups saw the victim as respectable under the different Resistance conditions is shown in Figure 9 ($F(3, 116)=7.00$). The pattern in the figure is quite clear and rather unlike any encountered thus far. Here, the groups appear to fall into response patterns primarily on the basis of their degree of involvement in intimate battering. The case study victim's resistance made no detectable difference to those with virtually no experiences of this sort. Victims and Abusers had some personal exposure to violent interactions with an intimate partner, but these had been relatively infrequent, their relationships had been generally of short duration, and most had been dissolved prior to the time of this study. These groups regarded the victim who resisted strongly as comparatively less respectable than one who responded passively. In contrast, respondents who had reported experiences as Both victims and abusers had had much greater personal involvement in violence with their intimate partners. Recall that these participants had reported relatively frequent episodes of violence and that their relationships tended to be

of longer duration and were generally still ongoing at the time of their participation in the study. These respondents viewed the passive victim as less respectable than the active victim.

Apart from interpreting the Figure 9 pattern as deriving from differences in level of personal involvement by the different groups, one might alternatively regard it as reflecting the connection between the type of violent experience one has had and one's beliefs about what "appropriate" victim's behaviors are in such a situation. Victims and Abusers were most familiar with the circumstance of one-sided violence, where only the abuser acted violently. These groups was the victim who departed from a passive behavior pattern as less respectable. Respondents with Both experiences were generally more familiar with interactions where both partners behaved violently, and they considered a passive victim to be less respectable than one who responded violently to her partner's abuse.

Abuser's Characteristics. Of four questions pertaining to the abuser's traits, only one emerged with significant effects in this study. In contrast to the findings for the victim's characteristics, ratings of the abuser's intelligence and of the abuser's respectability were unaffected by any of the factors examined here. Nor were there any effects associated with ratings of the abuser's immorality.

Only judgments of the extent to which the abuser was mentally ill exhibited significant results. These decisions varied as a function of both respondents' experiences and victim's level of resistance ($F(3, 117)=8.16$), as depicted in Figure 10. Note that this pattern resembles that shown in Figure 9 regarding the victim's respectability, except for the fact that the Abuser group tended to give lower overall ratings here, denying that their hypothetical counterpart was mentally ill. The fact that this configuration does parallel the Figure 9 ratings suggests that these decision about abuser's mental illness might similarly be explained as deriving from the respondents' level of involvement in intimate violence, or from their views about "appropriate" victim behaviors in such interactions.

Thus, for respondents who had only moderate levels of personal involvement in violence with a partner, or who were personally most familiar with situations where the victim reacted passively (i.e., Victims and Abusers), strong resistance on the victim's part weakened impressions of the abuser's psychopathology. On the other hand, for respondents who had deeper levels of personal involvement in intimate violence, or who were personally most familiar with situations where the victim reacted violently in turn (i.e., Both-role respondents), it was passivity on the part of the victim that interfered with perceiving the abuser to be mentally ill. It would appear, then, that the more a respondent regards the victim's response as comprehensible, familiar, and/or appropriate, the more s/he is willing to consider the abuser to be mentally ill, and vice versa.

Motives of the Abuser and Victim. Three questions related to the motives of the protagonists in the case study, two of which revealed significant effects in this analysis. No findings emerged here in connection with a question that asked subjects to rate the extent to which the abuser had "a need to prove his manhood."

Judgments of the extent to which the abuser was "motivated by a desire for violence" yielded two significant interactions. The Experience X Force

effect ($F(3, 113)=7.66$) is shown in Figure 11, which indicates that while the abuser's Force made little difference to respondents who had no violent backgrounds, the decisions of the groups with violent experiences were differently affected by this factor. Victims saw him as far more strongly motivated by a desire for violence when he used a high level of force, whereas the two respondent groups with experiences in the abuser role (Abusers and Both) saw him as actually wanting the violence less in the high Force case. A possible (admittedly speculative) explanation for this pattern is that the two abuser groups perceived the highly forceful abuser as "out of control" and hence as being less directed by specific motives and deliberate choices than the abuser who used a lower level of force.

The Experience X Resistance effect on attributions of the abuser's violence motive is given in Figure 12 ($F(3, 113)=8.78$). Very clearly, the victim's resistance affected these judgments only among Abusers, who substantially underrated the abuser's motive for violence when his victim reacted violently in return. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Abuser respondent group was most personally familiar with passive victims. One wonders how stronger reactions by their partners' would have affected their own desire for violence.

Ratings of the extent to which the victim had "a desire to be beaten or hit" revealed a main effect of Experience ($F(3, 117)=6.99$), which was qualified by two significant interactions. Overall, Victims and those with Both experiences gave ratings near the midpoint ($\bar{X}_B=5.4$, $\bar{X}_V=4.8$), while Abusers and those with no experiences of violence thought the victim had somewhat less desire for the abuse ($\bar{X}_N=3.0$, $\bar{X}_A=2.8$).

The Experience X Force interaction ($F(3, 117)=12.01$) in Figure 13 indicates that the Abuser's force made no difference to the judgments of those with no experiences of violence, but that the experienced groups differed depending on their levels of personal involvement. Victims and Abusers, who had personally had relatively moderate involvement in intimate abuse, saw the victim as wanting abuse less when it was more serious and its consequences were more severe. In contrast, those whose own personal experience had been more extensive and serious (i.e., those who had experienced Both roles) saw the victim as wanting her abuse more when it was described as more serious and its consequences were more severe. Ironically, it seems that a hypothetical victim is viewed as wanting her abuse more the more closely the seriousness of her circumstance conforms to an observer's own exposure to violence with an intimate partner.

A separate graph is not provided here for the Experience X Resistance interaction on perceptions of the victim's masochism ($F(3, 117)=19.19$), since the means for this effect resembled the pattern shown in Figure 7, which indicates the causal influence of the victim's behaviors. Thus, the victim's resistance had by far the greatest influence on the masochism ratings of the Victim group, who saw their hypothetical counterpart as more desiring abuse when she reacted violently than when she was passive. Those with experiences in Both roles were slightly in agreement with this decision pattern, but the judgments of the Abusers reflected the reverse opinion--that the victim had less desire for abuse when she resisted more strongly. Resistance had essentially no impact on the masochism decisions of those with no experiences of violence with intimate partners.

Summary

This section will focus on the central questions that guided the research, which were introduced briefly at the outset of this report.

Relation of Personal Experiences to General Attitudes and Evaluations. The respondent sample included subgroups with personal experiences in violent relationships, and dividing them on the basis of their roles in the violence revealed both qualitative and quantitative differences among them in other respects. On the one hand, general attitude measures about intimate violence revealed that individuals who had had experiences in both victim and abuser roles had lower victim-empathy than other respondents, and indicated that they could more equally imagine the feelings of both victim and abuser during a battering episode. This group was also distinguished by a deeper involvement in their violent relationships in that these tended to be ongoing, of longer duration, and to involve more frequent violent episodes. On the other hand, more complex differences among the groups were uncovered in their sensitivity to the dimensions of the case study episode, particular in their reactions to variations in the level of physical resistance offered by the victim. These are discussed more fully below.

Calling it "Battering." One of the major purposes of this research was to explore the dynamics that govern a person's willingness to term an event or series of events "battering." Three aspects of the findings reported here bear on this question. First, ratings by those with personal experiences of intimate violence concerning their willingness to call their own experience "battering" are an important resource, together with the correlates of these willingness ratings. As noted earlier, most respondents who had themselves had violent experiences declined to call these "battering," and groups who differed in the types of experiences they had (victim, abuser, both roles) did not differ overall in their rated willingness to apply the term "battering" to themselves. Analyses completed to this point have succeeded in identifying only one significant correlate of the labelling decision: the degree of maximum injury suffered by participants who had been victims. Thus, the more serious the consequence to oneself, the more willing one was to call a personal experience "battering." It was interesting that those in the abuser role were not analogously influenced in their self-labelling decisions by the seriousness of the injuries to their partners.

Second, respondents' verbal explanations of their decisions about considering themselves to be "battered" or "batterers" confirmed the importance of physical injury as a criterion for using this label. Other important criteria mentioned in these explanations included the duration and repetitiveness of the physical abuse, whether there was an intention to harm, whether the abuser's anger was understandable, and the emotional closeness of the relationship apart from the violence.

The third and final source of information on the labelling issue were the factors that were found to affect respondents' willingness to call the case study episode "battering." Both past experiences and the victim's level of resistance proved to be important determinants in this regard. Respondents with no experiences of violence and those who had only been abusers in their personal histories were relatively unaffected by the victim's resistance when making their decisions about labelling the case "battering." However, those who had had experiences as victims were affected by the victim's resistance in different ways, depending on whether they had

been only victims or had also been abusive themselves. That is, these respondents rejected the term "battering" in relation to victim's responses that departed from their own typical reactions--violent victims were not considered "battered" by those who had only been victims (and not themselves abusive), while passive victims were less likely to be termed "battered" by those who had themselves been violent.

Effects of Victim's Reactions on Evaluations and Perceptions. Whether the victim responded passively or was violent in return had far-reaching effects on respondents' evaluations of the case study, although the specific form of the effect in each case depended on the nature of the respondent's own experiences with intimate violence. This described the findings associated with the decision to label the case study "battering," as well as most of the remaining results described in this report:

(1) Identification with the victim and with the abuser were not affected by the victim's resistance for respondents with no violent experiences or for those whose experiences had encompassed both victim and abuser roles. However, participants who had been only victims and those who had been only abusers were affected by the victim's resistance when responding to the role that was not familiar to them: abusers identified more with the victim when she strongly resisted and was violent (as they had been), while victims identified more with the abuser when he was strongly resisted by his victim (and assaulted, as they had been).

(2) Respondents absolved the case study victim of responsibility and blame when her behavior matched their own (i.e., the passive victim was absolved by those who had themselves been passive victims, while the violent victim was absolved to some degree by those who had themselves acted violently). Decisions about the abuser's responsibility and blame were essentially mirror-images of this pattern.

(3) The victim's resistance affected decisions about the abuser's and victim's control in the situation, but the exact nature of the effect depended on whether the respondents had themselves been passive (victim only) or violent in turn (both victim and abuser). In both cases, more control was accorded a victim who departed from the respondent's own familiar method of response. The degree of control accorded the abuser was essentially a mirror-image of that attributed to the victim.

(4) Impressions about the victim's causal contributions to the violent episode essentially parallelled the results about her responsibility, and were reflected in ratings of her carelessness, and of the causal contribution exerted by her personality characteristics and by her behaviors. Surprisingly, there was no parallel pattern for ratings of the abuser's personality characteristics, which were not similar to judgments of his responsibility. Perceptions of the victim's intelligence were mirror-images of the ratings of her carelessness and responsibility--the more careless and responsible she was considered, the less intelligent she was thought to be.

(5) Ideas about the victim's respectability followed a different pattern, with those who had had a single role in their past (victim or abuser) seeing strong resistance as less respectable, and those who had experienced both roles, feeling the more strongly resisting victim was more respectable. It is unclear whether this result relates to the differences among these groups in their level of involvement in violent relationships or whether it relates to their

ideas about what types of responses are "appropriate" for a victim of partner violence. In any event, it is clear that the groups do judge the victim's respectability differently, depending on her reactions and on their own backgrounds.

(6) Ideas about the abuser's characteristics were largley unaffected by the factors examined here, with one exception. Judgments about whether the abuser was mentally ill tended to parallel decisions about the victim's respectability. The more a respondent considered the victim's response to be comprehensible, familiar, and/or appropriate, the more s/he was willing to regard the abuser as mentally ill. When the victim's response departed from what the respondent was familiar with in terms of victim behavior, however, ratings of the abuser's psychopathology showed that he was given the benefit of the doubt.

(7) Results for decisions about the abuser's motive for violence were consistent with the idea that those who had themselves been violent toward a partner regarded him as more "out of control" and hence as less directed by specific motives and deliberate choices when he used high force, whereas those whose experience had been only as victims saw the abuser as more strongly motivated by a desire for violence when he used a high level of force. Curiously, only those who had been abusers (and only abusers) were affected by the victim's resistance when deciding on the abuser's desire for violence. They tended to underrate his motive for violence when the victim responded violently (i.e., in a manner alien to their own experiences with passive partners).

(8) Those whose personal experiences with abuse had been moderate (abusers only and victims only) saw the victim as desiring abuse less when the abuse she received in the scenario was more serious and had more severe consequences. In contrast, those with more extensive personal experiences of intimate violence (in both victim and abuser roles) concluded the opposite--that she wanted it more the more serious and forceful it had been.

(9) Judgments of the victim's desire to be beaten or hit also followed ratings of the degree to which her behaviors had causally contributed to the incident.

Thus, one can conclude that the nature of the victim's reaction in an abusive episode has pervasive effects on evaluations and perceptions of the circumstance. Nevertheless, the exact nature of these effects is not the same for all observers, but depends critically on the nature of the observer's own personal history in relation to violent interactions with an intimate partner. This study has begun to uncover some of the complexities involved in this background experience-to-judgment link.

Reference Notes

1. Sedlak, A. J. Violence between intimate partners: Calling it "battering" and allocating blame. Paper presented at the Second National Conference for Family Violence Researchers, Durham, New Hampshire, August 7, 1984.

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Table 1

Partner Violence Scenario, Indicating Instructions, Force, and Resistance Variations

INSTRUCTIONS:	Standard	Empathy
	[Nothing other than to read the material and answer the questions following it].	As you read this case report, imagine that you are Karen M. and that the events in the report are happening to you. If you find this difficult to do, imagine that Karen M. is someone you care for a great deal and that these events are happening to this person you are very close to.
(All versions):	Karen M.'s husband, Frank, burst into the house after work in a rage. He wanted his dinner right away and when he didn't see it on the table, he grabbed her wrists and threw her against the wall. He pinned her against the wall with his hand on her throat.	
FORCE:	Low	High
	[Nothing added].	and punched and kicked her several times.
(All versions):	Karen was terribly frightened and	
RESISTANCE:	Low	High
	just stood there frozen.	she screamed at him to let her go and then kicked him hard.
(All versions):	Then he left and she realized that her neck	
FORCE (continued):	Low	High
	was sore and slightly bruised.	and face were bruised and cut and that she had several painful and swollen areas on her body.

Table 2

Reasons for Calling/Not Calling Own Experiences "Battering"

Reason	% Who Gave It
Severity of the physical consequences (or lack of it)	47%
Frequency, repetitiveness, duration (or insufficiency)	17%
Mere use of physical force	10%
Emotional closeness of the relationship in general	10%
Intention to hurt (or its absence)	7%
Justifiability/understandability of the abuser's anger	7%
Controllability of the abuser's actions (lack of)	3%
[No explanation offered for labelling decision]	23%

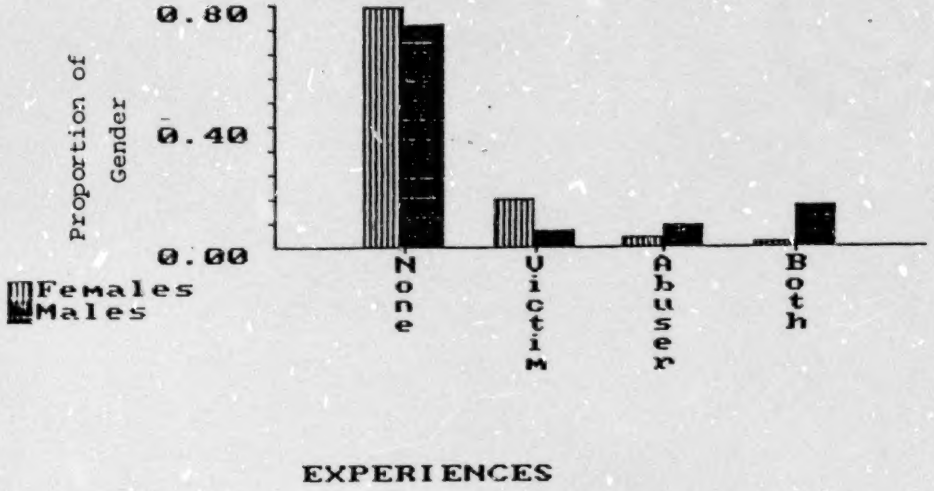
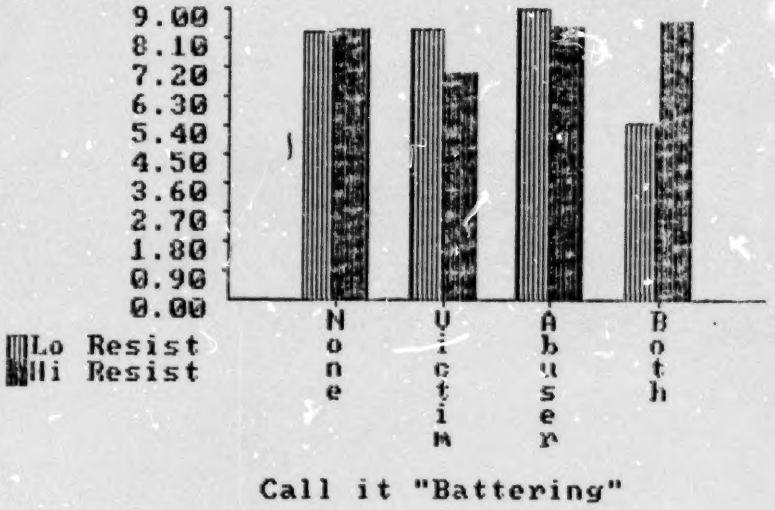


Figure 1.



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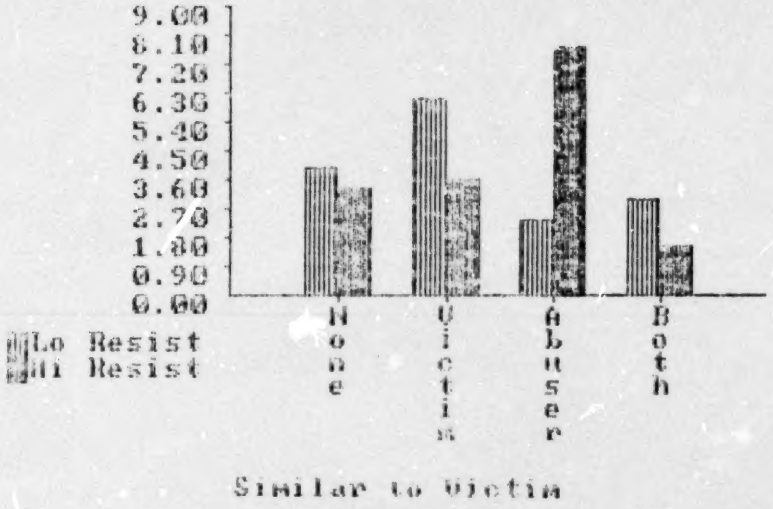

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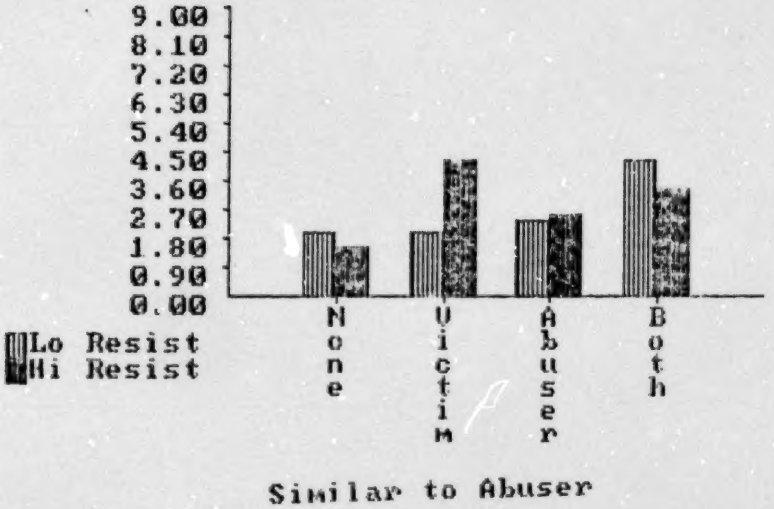

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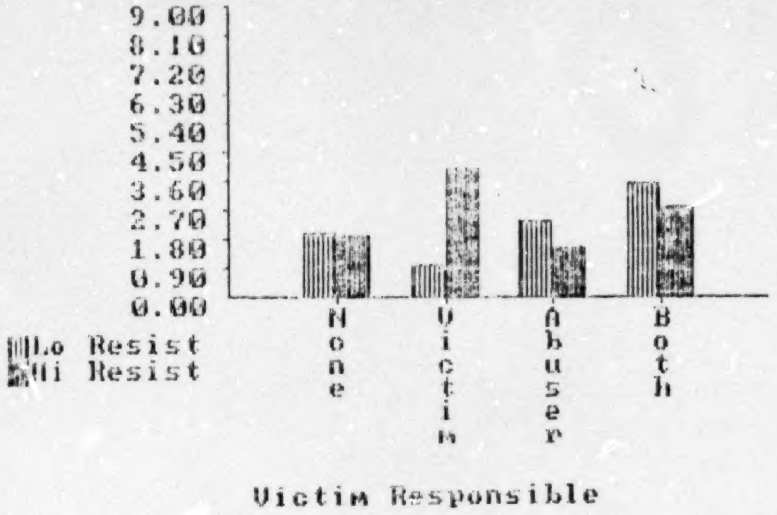

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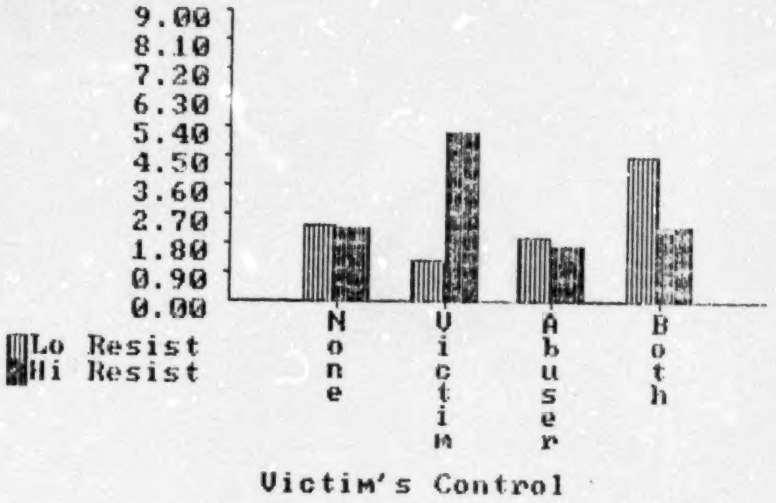

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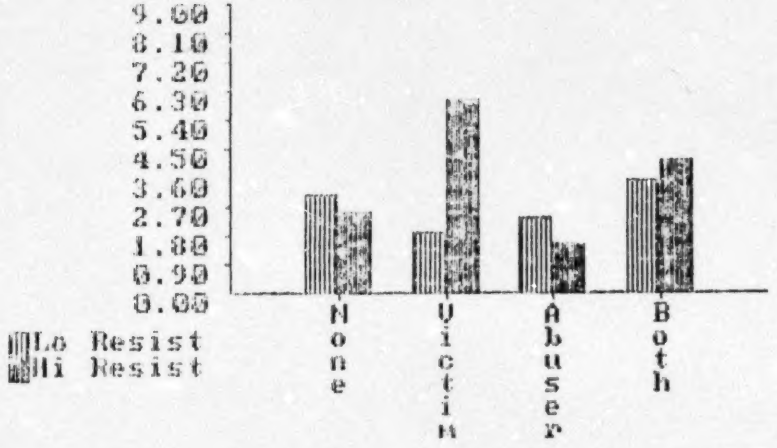

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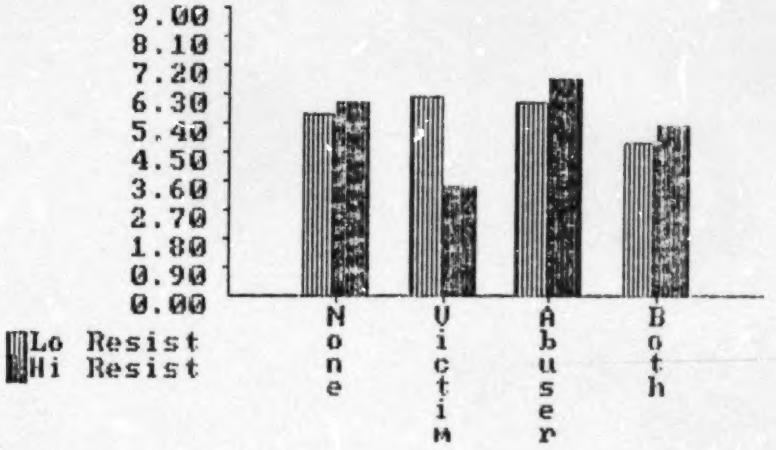

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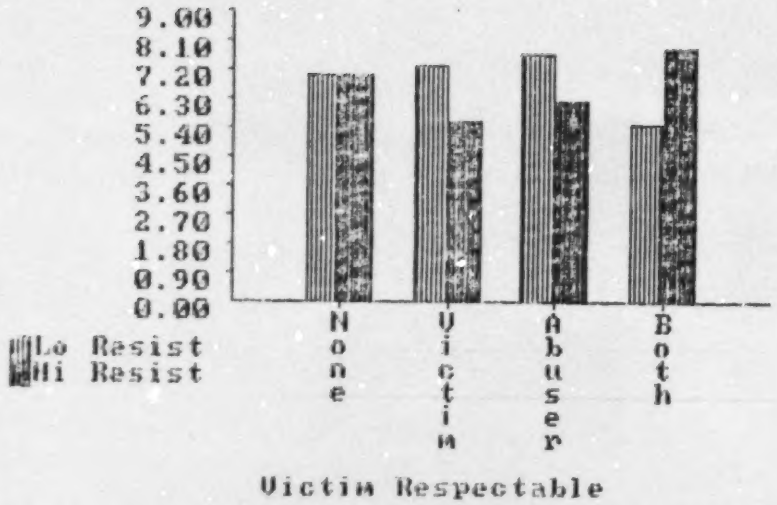

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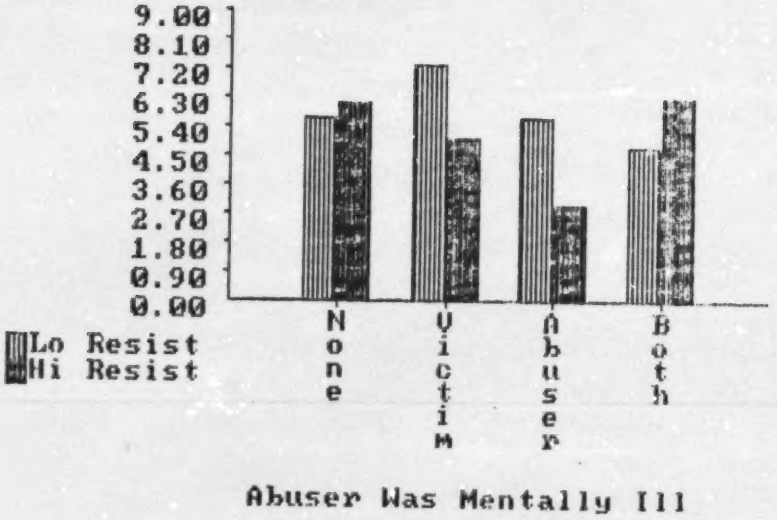

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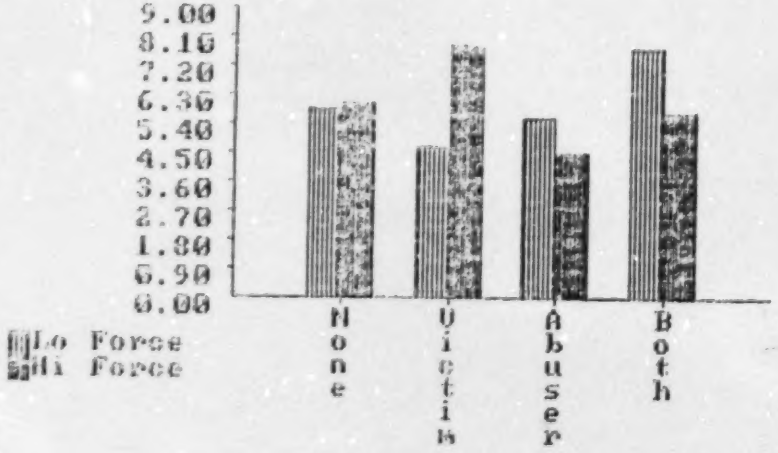

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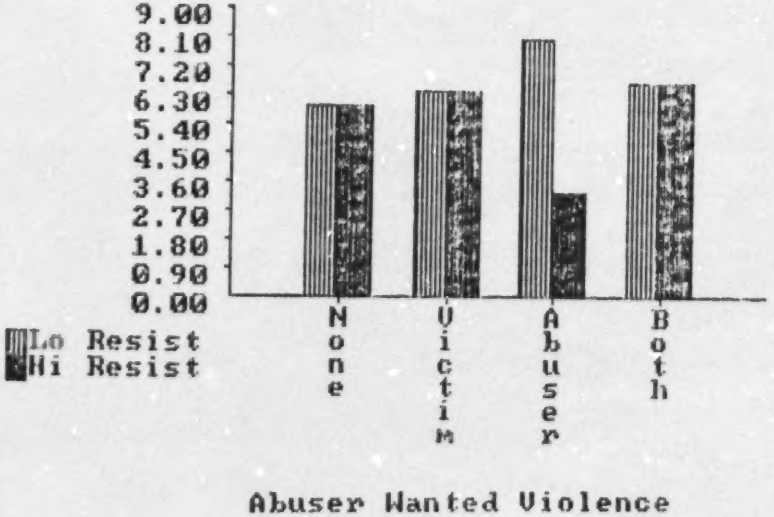

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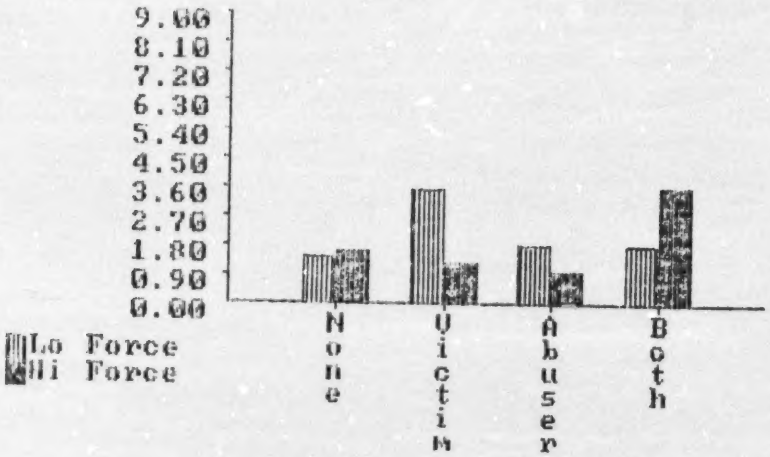

Victim Wanted Abuse

Figure 13.